

The Business Of State Antiques

By Sarah Booth Conroy

Clement E. Conger will ask the State Department's fine arts committee today to approve his plan authorizing a Buffalo, N.Y., furniture manufacturer to reproduce furniture from the Diplomatic Reception Room's Americana collection.

Kittinger furniture company wants to copy about 10 pieces of 18th- and 19th-century furniture.

In exchange, the committee's Americana fund would receive royalties amounting to between 5 and 10 per cent of the sales price. Other Kittinger reproductions range in price from \$300 to \$5,000.

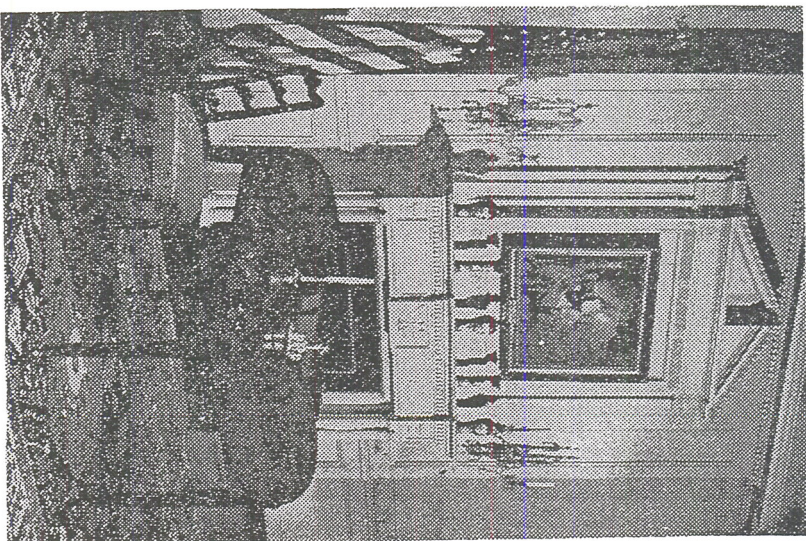
Usually routine, today's annual committee meeting may be somewhat livelier than those in the past. It comes at a time when Conger, who also serves as White House curator, is under attack for negotiating a contract with the Franklin

Mint, a private Philadelphia company, authorizing the production and sale of presidential medals in return for royalties to the White House Historical Association. The royalties are used to buy new acquisitions for the executive mansion.

The company's sales promotion heavily emphasizes the White House link. Joseph M. Segal, Franklin's board chairman, has denied any connection between the approval to produce the medals and his contribution of \$113,000 to the Nixon campaign fund.

Edwin C. Hutten, Kittinger's vice president in charge of advertising and liaison with Conger, said yesterday: "Our company didn't make any contribution to the November political campaigns. I know I

See CONGER, D2, Col. 1



This "Treaty of Paris" desk in the State Department's diplomatic reception rooms is one of about a dozen items the Kittinger furniture company may be allowed to reproduce.

Clement E. Conger: Money raising is a problem, says the White House curator, who proposes that a furniture company be allowed to copy antiques in the State Department's

didn't contribute more than \$25 to any one cause and I doubt if anyone else in the company did."

Conger said last night he had no qualms about putting the Kittinger contract on today's Fine Arts Committee agenda. He said he doubted the proposal would raise any great amount of money.

"I don't suppose we'd make more than \$15,000 a year out of it but it would be a continuing thing.

"Kittinger is the only company which has come to us with a proposal. If any other company came to us, I would be happy to pass along their offer to the committee. Once I get the committee's feeling on the subject, I will present the contract to the State Department's legal adviser, John Stevenson, for his advice. I don't imagine there will be any problem."

Conger said Kittinger already reproduces a three-shell chest with four drawers signed John Townsend, R.I., 1762, now on loan to the State Department from a private collector. The chest has been reproduced by Kittinger for 10 years. Proceeds of those royalties go to the Newport Preservation Society.

William Walton, former board member of the White House Historical Association, criticized the Franklin Mint arrangement as crass commercialism and a misuse of both the White House and its historical association.

Last night, Walton said that had he known of the Kittinger proposal, "I think it's shaming to the U.S. government to be a party to such ripoffs. Its shady stuff. If I were a furniture company I would strongly object to a branch of the U.S. government going into partnership with my competitor.

"It's all right for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Colonial Williamsburg and other private organizations to authorize reproductions, but not the U.S. Government, which should stick to the tax gathering business."

Walton questioned the whole concept of the State Department diplomatic rooms as a showplace for antiques.

Walton, who is not a member of either the State Department fine arts committee or the White House Historical Association, called the State Department building "awful" and added that installing an antique interior and antique furniture did not help any.

"Conger must be a man of limited taste," Walton said. "The White House doesn't look right. Some things are too big, some things too small. And all those curtains looped up like scoops of ice cream. I thought nobody could do in the White House worse than Jackie Kennedy did, but Conger has."

(Conger said later that he was "surprised" at Walton's criticism. "Anything I do is above board. He should know what a problem raising money is. I feel like buying my critics tickets to 'The Last of Mrs. Lincoln' where it tells about her problems in furnishing the White House.")

The opinions of Walton, an artist and writer, are not shared by all the State Department committee's members.

James Biddle, head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, said he thinks the Kittinger contract would be "absolutely legitimate. Everybody authorizes reproductions."

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where Biddle once was American wing curator, has for 15 or 20 years authorized reproductions of textiles, glass and silver. The National Trust, according to Biddle, currently has a contract with the Franklin Mint on a series of historic site medals.

"They paid us a royalty for our advice. They came to us as a source of information. I personally don't see it as skulduggery. It's a way to raise money so you don't have to use public funds. Since Congress doesn't make appropriations for these purposes the money has to be raised in other ways.

"The important thing, as we see it, is to maintain quality. It is important that accuracy be ensured. The real wrong doing comes when companies make adaptations and call them reproductions. Too often they're not accurate."

Hutten a Kittinger vice

president, said that every effort would be made to copy the historic pieces exactly. Kittinger already has contracts to reproduce Williamsburg furniture.

A reproduction of the Newport shell chest, with some extra fine finishing, was given to Marshal Tito in October, 1971, as a White House gift by President Nixon.

Hutten said that no piece of the furniture would have to be removed from the State Department to be reproduced. "Our copyists would work in an adjacent room. First they would make sketches. Then they would make clay forms of the carving to make plaster molds. We can be accurate to 130th of an inch."

Hutten estimated that it would be at least six months and probably a year, before Kittinger would be able to market the reproductions if the contract is approved.

The State Department fine arts committee meeting this morning may be better attended than usual. A num-

ber of members said they had not planned to attend, but now that they had heard about the Kittinger contract, they thought they would go.

"I intend to give it a great deal of thought indeed between now and the time of the meeting," said John Walker, former director of the National Gallery and a member of the White House Historical Association. Conger is wasting his time in White House. He should be working for ITT. Believe me, I shall be at that committee meeting."

Mrs. George Maurice Morris, another committee member who has a well-known collection of furniture and china, said she had been approached by another furniture company who wanted to reproduce pieces from her collection.

"I turned it down very strongly I rather felt as though, perhaps 'cheapen' isn't the right word, but I wouldn't do it. The State Department is rather different. It's a public thing. I don't know yet how I'll vote."